Draft paper for HAVE Seminar, School of Education, University of Nottingham, July 18th 2012 – I love being cited but the ideas are still developing so please do check for a later version and do send comments!

Challenging the Vocational Education and Training for Development Orthodoxy

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Introduction

What is so interesting about this topic? The first step towards an answer is that vocational education and training (VET) is a neglected part of academic work yet, even if given a narrow definition[i], it is experienced by hundreds of millions of people, and these are often the most marginalised. It also typically quite marginalised itself in policy terms: neither important people, nor their children, typically participate in narrow VET, although they are beneficiaries of VET when defined more broadly. So, there is a potentially big intellectual gap here, with the added bonus of a moral dimension of researching the lives of the marginalised.

Second, there are of course theoretical and policy accounts but these are unsatisfactory. Sometimes they seem to explain the world as it is quite well or appear to offer a practical agenda for improvement, but none of the main approaches does both satisfactorily. So, can we find a better model?

To have a problem is one thing, but research also needs an opportunity. As I have written elsewhere (McGrath 2011 and 2012), a policy moment has arrived due to the approaching end date for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2015. This has led to two pertinent debates to work within. First, the universal primary education component of the MDGs has been a "successful failure". What I mean is that its real success of getting millions of learners into primary schooling has led to pressure for higher levels of education, including VET, at the same time as its failure to reach its target has started a discussion of the need to see education systems as whole systems rather than being something where one part can be strengthened whilst neglecting the rest. This has encouraged the return of VET to the policy agenda in developing countries, including in India (King 2012) and Southern Africa (McGrath and Lugg 2012), for instance. At the global level, there has been the establishment of a new donor cooperation committee. More importantly, UNESCO has produced a new VET strategy (UNESCO 2010); a new publication on VET planning (King and Palmer 2010); and is currently finalising two global reports in this area- the *World Report on Technical and Vocational Education and Training* and the *Global Monitoring Report on Education for All 2012*.

Second, the sense that a clock is ticking has increasingly permeated the development community in 2012 and "Beyond 2015" is the development theme of the year. Until very recently, education was largely invisible in this debate, and VET totally invisible. However, this

is beginning to be addressed by the VET and development constituency, most notably through the efforts of Norrag (norrag.wordpress.com).

Crucially, this policy moment has led to personal spaces for engagement. I was contracted by SADC (and UNESCO) to lead the development of a new VET strategy for Southern Africa and I was seconded to UNESCO to be their lead advisor on the World TVET Report. Through the UK National Commission for UNESCO and the UK Forum for International Education and Training, I have led the UK engagement with the GMR from chairing the initial meeting responding to the outline terms of reference for the Report through to hosting the national dissemination event. Finally, through long-term involvement in Norrag, I have been one of those trying to raise the question of the role of VET in the official development agenda post-2015.

This paper is a "work in progress" as this series of seminars is intended. It draws both on my existing policy and academic writing and is intended as a stepping stone towards possible further writing in this area. It is aimed at being pedagogical for research students working on VET issues but also as a learning tool for myself in trying out some ideas that are still forming in my own mind; for writing and having this writing critiqued are central to developing thinking.

It offers a critique of current theorisation. As Foucault reminds us:

> A critique is not a matter of saying that things are not right as they are. It is a matter of pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practices that we accept rest. .... Criticism is a matter of flushing out that thought and trying to change it: to show that things are not as self-evident as one believed, to see what is accepted as self-evident will no longer be accepted as such. Practicing criticism is a matter of making facile gestures difficult. (Foucault 1990: 154-5)

It is intended as a provocation. It suggests that there are some alternative ways of thinking about these issues that may be seen as unorthodox in that they stand outside both the normal approaches of the economic orthodoxy of neoliberalism and the cultural/moral orthodoxy of liberalism. It offers positions that should also be subject to critique but intends to use them dialectically in an effort to generate a new theoretical moment to accompany the new policy moment.

In what follows, I will offer first a mapping of the main strands of writing about VET[ii] and will then ask how these relate to development. Then I will look at some alternative approaches that start from different first principles regarding development, human flourishing and the notion of vocation.

The main strands of VET theory

Neoliberal accounts

The dominant approach to VET has the following main characteristics:

- a productivist assumption about the nature of work and life, and
- a grounding in human capital theory, which in some contexts, leads to
- a critique of VET as inefficient and ineffective, particularly in its public forms, resulting in a threefold move towards
- first, a celebration of the skills market;
- second, the introduction of a new public management toolkit for VET reform (McGrath 2012); and
- third, a repurposing of all education as having the goal of enhancing employability.

According to Giddens (1994) productivism is a feature of late modernity. This era has seen paid employment's separation off from other aspects of life and the enshrining of economic development as the ultimate goal of society. As I note in McGrath (2012), Anderson (2009) builds on these arguments to claim that VET is built on two key productivist assumptions:

1. training leads to productivity, leads to economic growth (training for growth);

2. skills lead to employability, lead to jobs (skills for work).

I follow Anderson in seeing the VET orthodoxy as:

> based on a restricted and instrumental view of lifeworlds which reduces people and the environment to the status of human and natural resources for economic exploitation. Such a perspective overlooks the complex and interdependent nature of human existence, the source and meanings of which are inextricably linked to the social relations, cultural practices and natural material conditions. TVET students are not only already, or aiming to become, workers. They are also human beings and citizens with a wide range of needs, relationships, duties, aspirations and interests beyond work; in the family, the local community, in civil society and the global environment. Over their life course, they give birth, raise and care for family members, consume goods and services, manage finances, fall ill, experience unemployment and hardship, elect governments, get involved in community affairs and ultimately rely for their survival on the fruits of nature. Yet in TVET they learn only to labour and produce commodities. (Anderson 2009: 44–45)

This leads on to seeing VET as being a matter of human capital investment. Policymakers and institutional leaders routinely stress the importance of VET in terms of its returns to the individual through higher wages. This is backed up by rate of return analyses in countries such as Australia but it is also the core of the critique of VET in many developing countries, especially in Africa. Indeed, one of the elements of the justification for the MDG goals on primary education and girls' education was that these provided better rates of return than vocational or higher education, as I examine elsewhere (McGrath 2011).

This rate of return critique began in the late 1970s by the World Bank (especially Psacharopoulos 1981 and 1985; though with echoes of earlier work – e.g., Foster 1965) and was added to in the 1980s and early 1990s by a critique of the inefficiencies of public VET. This explained the low rates of return in terms of problems that particularly bedevilled public VET institutions, such as high equipment costs; small class sizes; poorly trained tutors; outdated curricula; and weak linkages to industry and commerce (World Bank 1991).

This led to much neglect of public VET systems by international funders, particularly as the primacy of primary education had been reinstated at Jomtien in 1990. There was some move towards trying to build training markets, working particularly to privatise public VET systems in Latin America and to build provision within the informal sector in Africa, although the former proved much more successful.

However, there was no stomach within the international community to close down public VET provision and national governments continued to see it as important, as did some donors, most notably those in the Germanic tradition. Instead, the period from the mid-1990s saw a major wave of reforms of national VET systems, including in the post-Communist states, that was based firmly on the principles of new public management. A new VET toolkit emerged, centred on:

- Systemic (and sometimes sectoral) governance reforms – focused on taking some of the authority for direction of the VET system out of the bureaucracy but also giving more power to shape policy directions to employers. This is presumed to make vocational learning more relevant and responsive.

- Qualifications frameworks – aiming to make qualifications more transparent to all stakeholders; to encourage vertical and horizontal movement of learners within learning systems; and to facilitate the wider accreditation of informal and non-formal learning.

- Quality assurance systems – designed to ensure that VET providers have internalised notions of quality and continuous improvement; and, often, intended to allow stakeholders to have confidence in the quality of providers through accreditation an inspection structures.

- New funding mechanisms – signalling a shift away from block funding of public providers to a regime in which funding is more outcomes-oriented and institutionally-neutral.
- Managed autonomy for public providers – introducing new governance structures designed to give a larger voice to stakeholders (especially industry); and greater autonomy for providers to be the locus of decision making; but, also, a requirement to respond to national policy directions and to perform against targets promoted through funding, reporting and inspection regimes (reproduced from McGrath 2012: 625).

Another strand of this literature, particularly prevalent in England after the further education incorporation of the early 1990s, is celebratory of the opportunities for heroic leadership that emerge from the increase in autonomy (e.g., Levacic and Glatter 1997; Lumby 2001).

NeoMarxist accounts

NeoMarxist accounts of VET begin from two main ideas. First, that VET is where working class kids disproportionately end up due to education's role in reproducing class and capitalism, whatever the debates regarding how this takes place (for instance, see the distinction between the accounts of Bowles and Gintis 1976 and Willis 1977 regarding how class is reproduced through education). Second, that capitalism tends inexorably towards a deskilling of workers and imposition of Taylorist work organisation (Braverman 1974). These lead on to a view of VET as low status learning for those designated by the systems as failures.

More recently, the rise of the employability agenda has led to a reawakening of a critique of schooling that can feel like a rebooting of the Marxist and anarchist critiques of the 1906s and early 1970s (e.g., Goodman 1964; Illich 1971). In these, the official role of education is seen as preparation for work. For critics, this both instrumentalises and devalues education but also condemns the losers in the educational race to irrelevant education - aimed at knowledge workers - and to failure that is described as their fault (e.g., Grubb and Lazerson 2009; Brown, Lauder and Ashton 2011- who extend the argument to higher education).

A further strand of critique focuses particularly on the introduction of the VET toolkit and the rise of new public management in VET. This is particularly strong in Britain, where there was a counterblast against the celebratory literature of the post-incorporation era (e.g., Ainley and Bailey 1997; Gleeson, Davies and Wheeler 2005).

The above are largely Anglo-Saxon approaches but there is another major strand of writings about skills that draws more broadly on a set of influences from a range of national traditions and which is often explicitly comparative in its focus. I will label this the political economy of

skills tradition, although it is rather diverse in its theoretical and ideological groundings. Indeed, it does some violence to elements of the approach to describe them as Neo-Marxist but such over-systematisation is necessary for mapping to work at the scale in use here. An important influence on this broad approach is the French Regulationist school (e.g., Aglietta 1979; Boyer 1989; Jessop 1990) but there are also contributions from Neo-Gramscians (Cox 1983; Bieler et al. 2006) and institutional economists (Hall and Soskice 2001). As pertains specifically to skills, this leads to a series of accounts that stress the historically-situated nature of skills, which is contextualised within national and, increasingly, global, patterns of economic and industrial development (e.g., Ashton and Green 1996; Crouch, Finegold and Sako 1999; Brown, Green and Lauder 2001; McGrath et al. 2004; Allais 2012).

Third Way accounts

Given the mention of Gramsci in the previous paragraph, I am tempted to suggest that a key difference between NeoMarxist and Third Way approaches is summed up by his aphorism: "pessimism of the intellect; optimism of the will". Many authors, me included, have tended to straddle the divide between having a theoretical pessimism regarding the ways in which capitalism undermines skills development; and a policy-oriented optimism about how reforms can take place. This is particularly evident in the South African literature where the Human Sciences Research Council has played a key role both as critical theoriser and governmental think tank.[iii] Essentially, the Third Way literature begins from the critical political economy analysis and then asks: how could we (typically Britain or South Africa) be more like them (often Singapore, Malaysia or, less often Finland – see Kraak 2011). However, in spite of looking east to developmental state models, it is often practically grounded in Anglo-Saxon attitudes that make common cause with new public management over the VET toolkit. Qualifications frameworks, for instance, can be seen as a progressive tool, reflecting in part the role of trade unions in some early versions (e.g., Australia and South Africa). In early days, this literature was very optimistic about a Post-Fordist future in which capital and labour could prosper in harmony, but this account had largely disappeared even before the current financial crisis.

Other accounts

For someone like me who is interested in policy and systemic issues these three are the main landmasses on a map of VET research. However, there are three other archipelagos of VET research that I should mention before proceeding. First, there is a literature that focuses on the lived experiences of learners and teachers in VET (e.g., Bloomer and Hodkinson 1997 and 1999;

Colley et al. 2003). Second, there is an approach concerned with knowledge, learning and skills acquisition, including sociologists of knowledge such as Young and Gamble (2006), and cognitive anthropologists such as Lave (2011). Finally, there is a philosophical tradition that seeks to continue the tradition of Dewey and which is best exemplified by Winch (2000 and 2002). Although they are not at the centre of my field of vision, I will return briefly to these, particularly Winch, towards the end of this paper.

But what about development?

This paper's title talks about VET and development but I have focused so far much more on the VET side. None of these accounts has an explicit theory of development underpinning it. Nonetheless, such theories can be discerned. All of the three main accounts are largely grounded in a taken-for-granted view of the primacy of the economic. I made this critique explicit above in the case of the Neoliberal approach, which can be characterised as modernist, industrialist and masculinist in its assumptions about the world. However, the other accounts differ from the dominant approach much more in terms of their views on the relative roles of state and market, and on the class biases of capitalism, than they do in their assumptions about the nature of development as being primarily about skills, work and wealth generation.

Yet, the productivist-economistic vision of development has been under severe threat for more than two decades. There are perhaps three main strands to these alternative accounts, which owe their power primarily to their advocacy by important UN agencies and processes and major international NGOs, rather than to academic theorisings.

First, the MDGs can be seen as part of a broader rights-based move. As I argued in McGrath (2012), the origins of a right-based approach to development most fundamentally lie in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UN 1948). The human rights approach focuses on what individuals have a right to as humans and it is particularly exercised by the lack of access to these rights of the poorest and most marginalised. As I noted in that paper, it has had important influences on a range of development discourses of the past 65 years, including basic needs (see King and McGrath 2012) and capabilities approaches (see below). Whilst its origins in the aftermath of the second world war and the foundation of the UN give the human rights approach a powerful moral force, it has been widely critiqued for its legalism and a tendency towards reifying contemporary notions of justice as applicable across time and space. However, it should be noted that such accounts have developed from the abstract universalism of Rawls (1971) towards much more flexible and contingent approaches such as that of Alston and Robinson (2005).

Primary and girls' education have been central elements of the rights-based approach, although this has been highly coloured also by an instrumentalist view of the productivity, health and population control benefits of girls' education. What the approach most usefully brings is a strong focus on access, equality and inclusion, and this has been powerfully reflected in the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education (especially Tomasevski 2001) and in the series of *Global Monitoring Reports.* Although this account has not been developed far for VET to date (see McGrath 2012), the 2012 GMR is likely to make a major contribution here, whilst the *World TVET Report* identifies equity as one of the three lenses though which to view VET policy.

Sustainable development has been another major strand of development policy and thinking. Last month saw the revisiting of the 1992 Rio Summit, more properly known as the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, and this has refocused international development thinking on the centrality of sustainable development. This has led to a proposal that a set of sustainable development goals (SDGs) to replace the MDGs in 2015. There is some broad support for this, but the exact relationship between SDGs and other post-MDGs; whether any global targets are appropriate; let alone any detailed discussion of what the SDG might be, are still uncertain. What is clear is that sustainable development continues to be understood as comprising economic, social and environmental dimensions. There has been an attempt to reflect this understanding in VET policy work, although there is little theory work that has taken place thus far (Anderson's paper cited earlier is an important exception). UNESCO has been at the forefront of policy work here, including its Bonn Conference of 2005 (UNESCO 2005), and the issue is addressed again in the *World TVET Report*. However, it appears at present that VET for sustainable development is still struggling to break out of the productivist discourse and very quickly becomes domesticated as "skills for the green economy".

In 1990 a major challenge to the Neoliberal development orthodoxy was launched with the UNDP's first *Human Development Report.* Led by Mahbub ul Haq, and with a powerful team of consultants including Amartya Sen, the HDR sought to offer a broader view of human development. The 20th anniversary HDR provides a clear definition of the approach as it has continued to evolve:

> Human development is the expansion of people's freedoms to live long, healthy and creative lives; to advance other goals they have reason to value; and to engage actively in shaping development equitably and sustainably on a shared planet. People are both the beneficiaries and drivers of human development, as individuals and in groups.
>
> Thus stated, human development has three components:

- Well-being: expanding people's real freedoms - so that people can flourish.
- Empowerment and agency: enabling people and groups to act - to drive valuable outcomes.
- Justice: expanding equity, sustaining outcomes over time and respecting human rights and other goals of society (UNDP 2010, 23).

Most practically, rather than reifying development as economic growth, the Human Development Index (HDI) offers a broader measure of development. However, the UNDP stresses that the HDI is not intended to provide universal policy answers but to stimulate reasoned and public reflection on context-specific development goals (UNDP 2010). The broader human development approach has gone far beyond the UNDP's concerns to make two major conceptual contributions to development theory in Sen's (1999) notion of "development as freedom" and in his and Nussbaum's (2000 and 2003) construction of the notion of capabilities. Of the three approaches mentioned here, it is this one which most concerns my work and which has begun to be taken up most clearly in a new attempt to build theory on VET for development, as I will explore in the next section of this paper.

Alternative approaches that start from different first principles about development, flourishing and the nature of vocation

The last 18 months has seen work on capabilities and VET begin to get attention, largely due to work here at Nottingham. This, of course, flows primarily from the centrality of Melanie Walker's work to discussions about education and capabilities, but also especially to the doctoral work of Aurora Fogues and Lesley Powell. Through my role in the UNESCO World TVET Report, some of this work has entered into that potentially influential document. Moreover, at the academic level, the presence of a paper from Lesley (Powell 2012) and a section on VET and capabilities in a paper of mine (McGrath 2012) in the recent IJED special issue on skills and development are already receiving unusually high early citations.

As I have noted elsewhere, a useful starting point in thinking about VET and capabilities is Walker and McLean's work on professional capabilities, developed in the South African context:

1. Informed vision, for example: Understanding how the profession is shaped by historical and current socio-economic-political contexts nationally and globally; understanding how structures shape individual lives; being able to imagine alternative futures and improved social arrangements.

2. Affiliation (solidarity), for example: Accepting obligations to others; care and respect for diverse people; understanding lives of the poor and vulnerable; developing relationships and links across social groups and status hierarchies; communicating professional knowledge in an accessible way/courtesy and patience.

3. Resilience, for example: Perseverance in difficult circumstances; recognising the need for professional boundaries; fostering hope; having a sense of career security.

4. Social and collective struggle, for example: Community empowerment approach; promoting human rights; contributing to policy formulation and implementation; identifying spaces for change/leading and managing social change to reduce injustice; working in professional and inter-professional teams; participating in public reasoning/listening to all voices in the 'conversation'; building and sustaining strategic relationships and networks with organisations and government.

5. Emotions, for example: Empathy/narrative imagination; compassion; personal growth; self care; integrating rationality and emotions; being emotionally reflexive.

6. Integrity, for example: Acting ethically; being responsible and accountable to communities and colleagues; being honest; striving to provide high-quality service.

7. Assurance and confidence, for example: Expressing and asserting own professional priorities; contributing to policy; having confidence in the value of one's professional work; having confidence to act for change.

8. Knowledge, imagination, practical skills, for example: Having a firm, critical grounding in disciplinary, academic knowledge; valuing indigenous and community knowledge; having a multidisciplinary stance and ability to see from different perspectives; being enquiring, critical and capable of evaluation, imaginative, creative and flexible; integrating theory and practice; being problem-solvers; open minded.

Source: Walker and McLean 2010: 856-7.

For me, this list does two important things. First, it makes practical the philosophical question of what the ultimate purposes of professional education might be. In Walker and McLean's particular formulation, this leads to a powerful stress on social justice. Second, the "might" is crucial, as they insist, following Sen, that such lists are not universal but must be constructed in

social dialogue in specific contexts. This is in stark contrast to much of the trend in recent years in vocational and professional education towards centrally determined competencies that disassemble the work of professionals, decentre professional judgement and depoliticise the question of what professions are for. Work from another of our doctoral students, Zoe Lim (2012), though not couched in capabilities language, reinforces this argument by showing the fundamentally contested and contextual nature of the development of professions and, hence, professional development.

A third potentially important idea I take from Walker and McLean is their notion of an institutional capability of connectedness. Though not the heart of their work, they suggest that institutions too have to develop capabilities that allow them to respond to their goals and challenges. As I have noted, this is somewhat analogous to the VET concept of responsiveness. However, it offers a radical alternative to the narrow economism of responsiveness by being located firmly in a social justice frame. Here I think a third concept developed in South Africa may also be usefully introduced: that of receptiveness. Akoojee (2007) argues in the case of private providers that they have a particular challenge of being seen to be receptive to national development objectives, as well as business considerations. Taken together, these notions of connectedness, responsiveness and receptiveness point us towards the need to have VET institutions and systems that seek to engage with the needs and aspirations of individuals, communities, firms and the nation, and to balance economic and social rationales, rather than to simply serve single agendas.

Whilst Walker and McLean are concerned with higher education, Powell (2012) more specifically takes the capability approach forward in thinking about VET. Her focus on learners' voices and on how VET has expanded their capability to choose and to aspire, allows her to highlight the real possibilities of vocational learning to contribute to the growth of individuals and communities that go far beyond a narrow understanding of employability. I have then built on this (McGrath 2012 and in the UNESCO World Report) to suggest that there is definite potential in using a capabilities perspective to see what could be learnt in different VET settings and how. I propose that a wider view of well-being and agency can help in the development of a more radical notion of learning for life. In this regard, vocational learning can play a crucial role by supporting learning for multiple purposes, including:

- cultural purposes, as in learning Chinese calligraphy;
- leisure purposes, such as learning woodworking for personal fulfilment rather than trade;
- communicative purposes, as in assisting the elderly in learning how to use email to keep in touch with dispersed families;
- caring purposes, such as developing skills to care for people living with AIDS;

- spiritual development purposes, as in learning to improve one's ability to communicate religious ideas to one's children; and
- community development purposes, such as building skills to facilitate community projects.

This takes me back to the argument earlier in this paper against productivism. In it I am insisting that VET is not only about the economic. This has led us in the World Report team to develop a set of lenses through which, we argue, those deciding on VET policy must consider their goals. In these we stress the importance of the equity dimension alongside the economic. However, more radically, we suggest that VET needs to be seen more transformatively, both in terms of how it needs transformation but, more crucially, in how it can support transformation of individuals and societies.

An important element of the transformative lens is what we term "well-being", although the language here is complex and contested. We note that one strand of well-being thinking has been in the capabilities and human development tradition outlined already. However, we note that there is another approach that has begun to be applied to VET. This attempts to find new ways of measuring well-being, drawing insights from such fields as economics, statistics, psychology, public health and criminology. It accepts the economic growth is inadequate as a measure but, like the HDI, believes that a more sophisticated measure is possible. However, there is none of the conscious reflexivity and modesty of the HDRs in this approach, led by the OECD.

The OECD categorises "well-being and progress" into three distinct areas:

Measuring people's material living conditions This requires looking not only at their income but also at their assets and consumption expenditures and how these are distributed among different population groups. It also requires taking account of goods and services produced by households for their own use that are never bought or sold, and which do not appear in traditional economic measures.

Quality of Life Economic resources, while important, are not all that matters for people's well-being. Health, human contact, education, environmental quality, civic engagement and governance, security, and free time are all fundamental to our quality of life, as is people's subjective experience of life. Measuring quality of life requires looking at all of these elements as a whole (economic and non-economic, subjective and objective), as well as taking into consideration disparities across population groups.

Sustainability	Sustainability of well-being over time can be assessed by looking at the key economic, social and environmental assets transmitted from current to future generations, and whether these assets will allow people and their children to meet their needs in the future.

Source: OECD, 2011

The OECD has also developed a "Better Life Index", which brings together quantitative data for 11 areas:

- Income and Wealth
- Jobs and Earnings
- Housing
- Health Status
- Work and Life Balance
- Education and Skills
- Civic Engagement and Governance
- Social Connections
- Environmental Quality
- Personal Security
- Subjective Well-Being (OECD 2011)

The Australian National Centre for Vocational Education Research has used a similar approach to explore what constitutes well-being for young people (Nguyen 2011). This research suggests that having a satisfying job is very important to young people's psychological well-being. Indeed, well-being was higher when unemployed rather than working at a dissatisfying job. By stressing the important psychological dimension of well-being, this reinforces the argument for decent work, and VET's role in supporting it.

Lurking behind these notions of human development and well-being, and indeed similar conceptions of happiness, is a sense that money isn't everything. This has led some writers to return to Aristotle and the notion of eudaimonia to look for insights into these issues (e.g., Skidelsky and Skidelsky 2012). The translation of this concept into English has been controversial (see Warburton 2006), and has generated various terms such as well-being, happiness, the good life and flourishing. For me, like the Skidelskys and Warburton, it is towards the latter two versions that I think attention should be directed. This is also clearly the direction that Sen and Nussbaum have come from in building their approach to capabilities. It is apparent from the Aristotelians that there is no single version of the good life; rather it is for individuals to discern what they value – echoed in capabilities thinking. Crucially, Warburton notes, the good life for Aristotle is never fully achieved for all time. Rather, its gains are reversible. However, more importantly, it is a process of striving to become more human – a

vocational practice in a deeper sense than we use the term typically in VET debates. Warburton stresses Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* as practical; focused on this striving and this is one of the reasons for his preference for the active notion of flourishing rather than the potentially more static and contemplative connotations of the good life.

This notion of flourishing takes me to the final theme I would like to explore in terms of the possible wider purposes for VET. The notion of human flourishing has been taken up in Christian circles, for instance by Theos (2010), in a revisitation of a very long tradition, especially within Catholicism, of seeing Aristotelianism as a crucial philosophical tool to support theological thinking. It is to the Catholic tradition, my own, that I now want to turn.

The preferred Catholic language for talking about these matters in a development sense is "integrated human development" but this lies nested within "Catholic Social Teaching", which is nested in turn in the wider theological teachings of the Church. As a result, the key texts for this section are a set of papal encyclicals stretching over more than a century. It is important to note that these are not works of dogma but are intended to be pedagogical and pastoral letters, underpinned by theological and philosophical reflection.

From *Rerum Novarum* (Of New Things) in 1891 to *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth) in 2009, an account has developed that has responded to major transformations such as the Industrial Revolution; the rise, and then fall, of Communism; and latterly to international development. As I argue in McGrath (2012), across these encyclicals there is a strong rejection of modernity's market-state dialectic and clear criticisms of the failings of both communism and capitalism as models of economic and social development.

For the purposes of this paper, *Populorum Progressio* (The Development of Peoples) (1967) is particularly fascinating for its anticipations of elements of current human-centred development accounts, such as freedom, peace, human security, intergenerational responsibility and environmental stewardship. However, the approach, for me, goes beyond the human rights approach in stressing that we have moral duties as well as rights: ''Collaboration in the development of the whole person and of every human being is in fact a duty of all towards all.'' (John Paul II 1987, 32).

Another major point of departure for this approach is that it is transcendental in outlook, firmly placing God's relationship to humanity at its centre. This results in an emphasis on the unconditional value of the human person and a focus on all aspects of humanity, rather than just economic growth or poverty reduction:

> It is not just a question of eliminating hunger and reducing poverty. It is not just a question of fighting wretched conditions, though this is an urgent and necessary task. It involves building a human community where men [sic] can live truly human

> lives, free from discrimination on account of race, religion or nationality, free from servitude to other men or to natural forces which they cannot yet control satisfactorily. It involves building a human community where liberty is not an idle word. (Paul VI 1967, 47)

Thus, human dignity is the most important element of human development (Leo XIII 1891). This notion is built on three pillars: the common good, solidarity and subsidiarity (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 2004). The common good stresses the role of society and community in ways that have been underplayed in the classically liberal approaches of secular human development theories. At the same time, subsidiarity stands as guard against collectivism; whilst solidarity speaks against the atomism and greed of capitalism. They also anticipate one of the classic criticisms of development practice, as a form of disempowerment by external professionals, by stressing that development is a duty of all people, and must be built on their existing capacities. Our vocation lies, therefore, in striving to become more fully human and in supporting others to do the same.

One of the very serious weaknesses of human rights and human development approaches is their neglect of work. In this, they appear to have retained some of the patrician qualities of Aristotle, whilst of course condemning such ephemera as the slave-owning context in which he lived and wrote. Here for me is one of the most important resources provided by Catholic social teaching: its focus on work as one of the most central elements of development.

For instance, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (PCJP) argues that work is the ''essential key'' to the whole social question and is the condition not only for economic development but also for the cultural and moral development of persons, the family, society and the entire human race (2004, 269).

Work is nothing less than an integral part of humanity. As a result, it should never lead to alienation or to the instrumentalisation of the worker. This has led the Vatican to be a very vocal support of the ILO's decent work campaign:

> What is meant by the word ''decent'' in regard to work? It means work that expresses the essential dignity of every man and woman in the context of their particular society: work that is freely chosen, effectively associating workers, both men and women, with the development of their community; work that enables the worker to be respected and free from any form of discrimination; work that makes it possible for families to meet their needs and provide schooling for their children, without the children themselves being forced into labour; work that permits the workers to organise themselves freely, and to make their voices heard; work that leaves enough room for rediscovering one's roots at a personal, familial and spiritual

> level; work that guarantees those who have retired a decent standard of living. (Benedict XVI 2009, 63)

This leads to a view that VET is not about narrow employability, but about broader lifelong and lifewide learning.

More of a call to action than a conclusion

It is possible to see ways in which these very different traditions of thinking about human development may be seen as contradictory and in conflict. In this country, there is a current stream of militant atheism that wants to both deny the right to express a religious perspective on any matter, and which also tends towards a positivism and scientism that seeks to close out any space for transcendental value, regardless of origins. However, this seems to me to impoverish what it means to be human and, hence, our potential for striving towards our own flourishing and that of others.

Rather, I want to suggest that there are common truths across secular and religious accounts of human development and important insights from each that can be brought together. Given the focus of this paper on VET and development, I think that the Catholic perspective addresses a great weakness of the human development and capabilities approach. Nonetheless, in important ways it does connect with the liberal tradition of VET, which I see as connecting through such authors as Dewey and Winch and through UNESCO's tradition of stressing a broader human purpose for learning, something that the latest TVET Report seeks to continue.

However, the case for a moral purpose for VET, particularly when that goes beyond the narrow inculcation of elements of employability skills such as timekeeping, honesty and hard work, still tends to get swamped by economic arguments. Similarly, a broad sense of VET being for human flourishing or sustainability easily gets crowded out by the pressing moral crusade for employment for marginalised youth.

Of course, this is hardly to be wondered at. Indeed, economic considerations must be given very great consideration and we should take very seriously the notion that young people have a right to work and to high quality learning which facilitates this. However, we would be impoverished as humans if we did not look to how we can build beyond immediate employability concerns to ask increasingly big questions about everyone's right to decent work and to flourish, and about how a better life can be transmitted intergenerationally whilst sustaining the flourishing of our planet and its other inhabitants.

Of course, this is not the kind of message that institutional managers, government officials and ministers want to hear. It is too difficult and impractical, as they see it. Such positions do require some respect. However, I wish to push against this by reminding us that these officials and politicians are supposed to be at the service of the people, and that making a dysfunctional, dehumanising and unsustainable institution or system better is not what is required. Rather, we do need urgent dialogues about what the ultimate purposes of VET are; what models of work these support; and what practical approaches to enhancing human flourishing can be strived for. The UNESCO TVET Report is modestly ambitious in calling for a transformative approach to VET but academics have a freedom to go beyond that modesty and to aspire to envisage and embody flourishing VET for flourishing people on a flourishing planet.

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[i] Such as VET is what is done in public VET institutions – essentially the UNESCO Institute for Statistics approach. As you might guess, this is a classic iceberg fallacy – we are measuring what it is easy to see but at least some of us realise that there is something far larger that is hidden from view.

[ii] This is not only schematic but shamefully Anglophone and ignores much of the several other vibrant linguistic communities of practice in VET, most notably the Germanic tradition, cf. Rauner and Maclean 2009.

[iii] Lesley Powell is currently developing a historiography of South African skills writing since Apartheid that will address this issue amongst others.